

The Honorable Mario Gallegos
State Senator – District 6
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Gallegos:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on behalf of the residents of Hidalgo County. We greatly appreciate the work that you and this committee do and your contemplation of ways to address flooding and evacuation issues.

Hidalgo County suffered over \$18 million in damages to public and private property plus an additional \$4 million in damages to drainage infrastructure from Hurricane Alex which made landfall June 30, 2010 but whose effects were felt in our region for over 40 days. The rain led to Rio Grande River levels not seen in over 40 years and the rain from the hurricane plus the water traveling along the watershed affected many residents that had over five feet of water in their homes and threatened thousands more.

Thanks to recent levee improvements and a temporary levee built with the assistance of the state, we were able to save many more homes from being severely affected by flooding. As you know, Hidalgo County has worked tirelessly to have the levees repaired and improved over the past four years. By using local funds and partnering with U.S. Homeland Security and International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), Hidalgo County has been able to see the improvement of 35 miles of levees. These improvements help protect 58,000 homes, 2,800 businesses, and nearly \$1.76 billion in assets. Without these critical improvements, this recent event would have brought greater devastation to our region. I take this opportunity to thank Texas Division of Emergency Management Chief Nim Kidd and all of his staff for an outstanding response and excellent support during Hurricane Alex. The State's assistance has been invaluable to Hidalgo County residents preparing for and recovering from natural disasters.

However, despite these improvements, the risk of major flooding resulting from the heavy downpour of Alex led to the drop of thirty-eight 3,000-pound sandbags deployed via helicopter for a makeshift levee and immediate reinforcements to the Penitas pump house integrated into the flood-control levee system to prevent water from flooding one of our communities and cutting water services to nearly 300,000 residents. What this has shown us is that there are still areas of improvement that must be addressed soon for the protection of many residents.

The recent storms that have passed through our region have strengthened our conviction that there is a need to maintain our levees at an optimal level and improve our current drainage infrastructure, but also to have permanent shelters and a regional version of Taskforce One to help mobilize equipment. Local entities have done a good job at coordinating and working as a team to respond to natural disasters and the success of the joint efforts has made it clear that a regional disaster management approach is the best option to ensure the safety of residents.

I will be available to answer any questions and offer any assistance to help our state continue providing security and assistance to our communities. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

Rene A. Ramirez
Hidalgo County Judge